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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SOCIAL ISOLATION OF ALBERTA FARM WOMEN

BY

NANCI L. LANGFORD

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if women living on grain farms in Alberta feel socially isolated and what lifestyle factors or experiences predict feelings of social isolation for these women. A working definition of social isolation was developed using existing research and theory.

The sample was two hundred and eighty-eight adult women living on grain farms in seven agricultural regions of Alberta. Various demographic and family and work role characteristics of the women were analyzed as potential predictors of feelings of isolation using step-wise multiple regression analysis.

A significant finding was that the majority of farm women sampled do not feel socially isolated. The strongest predictor of feelings of social isolation was satisfaction with the marital relationship. There was a significant correlation between satisfaction with farming as a way of life and feelings of social isolation. The major contributing factors to satisfaction with farming as a way of life appeared to be personal satisfaction with farm work and husband's support for off-farm employment. The conclusion is that for this sample group, feelings of isolation stem from the marital relationship and work role conflicts.

This study has contributed to a growing body of theory on social isolation, and addressed some of the assumptions

of previous research about the experiences and causes of social isolation among farm women.

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SOCIAL ISOLATION OF ALBERTA FARM WOMEN

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Recent Canadian and American studies on the life and work of farm women either report or presume experiences of isolation (Ireland, 1983; Kivett, 1978; Koski, 1982; Wilkening, 1981). In these studies, isolation is rarely defined or described. There are no references to the characteristic symptoms or effects of isolation, to the conditions which create it, or the frequency with which it is reported. It is a concept often talked about but little studied or understood.

The geography of western Canada in particular provides one condition for isolation: farms are often large, with neighbours and communities situated miles apart. Several authors indicate that the presence of telecommunications and motorized transportation in present day farm life has dramatically decreased the influence of geography in making farmers feel isolated (Kohl, 1976; Sutcliffe & Crabbe, 1964; Vanier Institute of the Family, 1968; Women of Unifarm, 1978).

Despite the technological advances, social isolation, which can be described as the "deprivation of social contact and content", (Bennett, 1980. p.2) is still experienced in modern urban and rural life. Today's farmer may face new obstacles to maintaining satisfying social contacts. The necessity to support the farm with

additional outside employment, or increased production demands to meet farm debts may limit farm men and women's time for and accessibility to friends and neighbours (Berkowitz & Hedlund, 1979; Berkowitz & Perkins, 1984; Goetting et al., 1982; Hedlund & Berkowitz, 1979; Ireland, 1983; McGhee, 1984; Scholl, 1983b).

Historically, isolation has been more frequently identified as a problem for farm women than for farm men (Binnie-Clark, 1979; Kohl, 1976; Pearson, 1979; Robinson, 1979; Sachs, 1983; Silverman, 1984; Tasaka, 1978). One reason suggested for this gender difference is the nature of the work roles farm men and women perform. The business of farming provides farm men with fairly regular interaction with an adult social world. The nature of household work and child care limits a farm woman's adult social contacts (Eichler, 1983; Pearson, 1980; Robinson, 1979; Sachs, 1983). Another possible reason why women on farms report feelings of isolation more frequently than men is the way they relate to the farm enterprise. Wilkening (1981) reports that farm women see farming more as a way of life than as a profit-making business. Their evaluation of farming would therefore reflect personal feelings about hardships and rewards of the lifestyle as well as the family business. Research on friendships, isolation, social networks and the impacts of moving all report that lack of friends and confidants is a hardship more deeply felt by women than by men (Bahr & Garrett, 1976; Bennett,

1980; Candy, Troll & Levy, 1981; Fairbanks & Sundberg, 1983; Jerrome, 1981; Kivett, 1978; Miller & Ingham, 1976; Robinson, 1979).

Autobiographical accounts of the settlement years in Alberta reveal the loneliness and lack of companionship suffered by farm women (Binnie-Clark, 1979; Robinson, 1979; Silverman, 1984; Tasaka, 1978). Several of the province's farm women's organizations were organized specifically to assist with this problem (Robinson, 1979; Tasaka, 1978; Women of Unifarm, 1978). Some authors suggest that the modern farm family, as a small "nuclear" family is possibly more isolated than its pioneering ancestors (Kohl, 1976).

The debilitating effects of loneliness and social isolation are well documented (Kivett, 1978; Lowenthal & Haven, 1968; Silverman, 1984; Tolsdorf, 1976). Bennett (1980) describes research that connects poor mental health and low self-image with experiences of social isolation in older people. Isolation has been called a "critical antecedent" to some physical ailments (Bennett, 1980, p.13). Peplau and Perlman (1982) state about the medical consequences of isolation: "the general conclusion we draw from this literature is that social isolation is detrimental to health and life expectancy" (p.20). As ever, the farm enterprise is highly dependent on the health and stability of the farm family and its individual members. The importance of the farm woman's health and well-being to the family business should not be

underestimated.

Many farmers are also dependent on exchange of work and services with other farm families to supplement family and hired labour in keeping the farm viable. Several studies state that these exchanges are based solely on friendship ties established by family members (Kohl, 1976; Robinson, 1979). These exchanges serve both vital economic and social functions.

This inquiry will examine the issue of social isolation of Alberta farm women in the modern farm setting. A preliminary examination of concepts and ideas will result in the development of a working definition of social isolation appropriate to this context. An analysis designed to determine the lifestyle factors that contribute to feelings of social isolation will also be presented.

Study Definitions

The Census Canada definition of a farm is a land holding of at least twenty acres which produces at least $2500 in agricultural products. A grain farm is one on which at least 75% of gross income comes from production of grain crops. A farm woman is defined as an adult female person who lives on the farm and is related in some way to the operator of the farm, or is the operator of the farm. Farm work describes the whole range of tasks that contribute to the production of crops and/or livestock for the purpose of marketing. For the purposes of this study, off-farm employment is any work engaged in away from the

farm enterprise for which remuneration is received.

Justification of the Study

Several authors suggest that women are a major influence in maintaining a class of people attached to the land (Ireland, 1983; McGhee, 1984; Robinson, 1979; Sachs, 1983; Vanier Institute of the Family, 1968). Robinson (1979) states that accounts by pioneers agree that "the men who failed were usually men without women" (p.10). An Alberta study conducted by Abell (1954) found that the most productive farms were those where an adult woman lived. The loneliness resulting from social isolation is a threat to physical and mental well-being of farm women. If we value the family-operated farm in our culture, both as a unit of production and as a viable choice of lifestyle, attention to the needs and feelings of women performing this vital function is imperative.

Today's farm business is often solely dependent on the cooperative work-sharing of family members. The farm family and its stability are the heart of the successful farm enterprise. Social isolation experienced by farm women may contribute to marital stress and conflict, to difficulties with child-rearing and may affect family functioning, thus threatening the stability of the farm itself.

Yet as Tasaka (1978) points out, "serious systematic study into the needs of rural women has been rare" (p.8). And examination of the presence and impact of social

isolation experiences, both for rural women and for people in general has been very limited. Social isolation has been documented as an historical phenomenon in Alberta farm life (Robinson, 1979; Silverman, 1984; Tasaka, 1978). We do not know if it is a contemporary phenomenon, how to assess it, or to what extent it affects the lives of Alberta farm women. This study is an attempt to explore some of these questions.

The answers to these questions will be significant to all researchers and professional helpers concerned with the problem of social isolation and its effect on people. It will provide some insights for farm men and women into their own lives and their relationships with others. It will help researchers and the general public to examine their assumptions about farm women as socially isolated persons.

Objectives of this Research

1. to develop a working definition of social isolation using existing research and theory
2. to use the working definition to ask Alberta farm women about their feelings of social isolation
3. to determine if there are any personal characteristics of farm women or aspects of their lifestyles which create or influence feelings of isolation

Research Questions

This research will specifically address the questions:

1. Do Alberta farm women feel socially isolated?
2. Are there specific lifestyle factors or experiences that reliably predict feelings of isolation for Alberta farm women?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter will present a review of literature and a theoretical framework for this study. A discussion on the current status of research and theory on social isolation will lead to a working definition of social isolation for this research. A review of recent research will identify potential predictors of feelings of isolation for Alberta farm women.

Theory development on the concept of social isolation is limited. Studies of loneliness and isolation and of social networks provide most of the theoretical assumptions related to social isolation. This review of literature begins with a presentation of several theoretical assumptions made by researchers about social isolation.

The first assumption upon which research is developed is that there are certain identifiable groups in society which are by nature isolated. Researchers in this area identify "at-risk" groups such as widows, elderly people and people living alone to test out theories on loneliness and isolation. Though not often studied, farm women are frequently identified as an "at-risk" group (Ireland, 1983; Kivett, 1978; Koski, 1982; Wilkening, 1981). There is an approach common to most studies: to begin with a group presumed to be isolated; to place members of the group on a measurement continuum to determine level of isolation or

loneliness; and subsequently to study the social interaction or social network characteristics of these subjects. The focus of these studies is to either develop more reliable measures of isolation or to understand what an isolated person is and does. The selection process for presumed isolated groups is based on the principle that social isolation is experienced mainly by people who live alone or are alone most of the time.

The second assumption apparent in the literature is that everyone would describe or define isolation the same way and that the phenomenon of isolation is essentially the same experience for everyone, that everyone is talking about the same phenomenon. There is a real weakness in the literature in the lack of clear definitions or agreement upon any one definition of isolation. Some authors differentiate between the concepts of loneliness and isolation, while others use them interchangeably. And theoretical frameworks on which studies are based, when they are made explicit, vary widely. There is no agreement about whether isolation should be studied from a cognitive, systems theory, interactive, psychodynamic or phenomenological perspective. This makes it extremely difficult to compare studies except with respect to the extent to which the researcher has developed a particular theory.

A third assumption about social isolation that studies appear to support is that one's state of isolation is best

defined or identified by an outside person, such as a researcher. It appears that the individual's definition of his own social situation is not viewed as a reliable indicator of isolation, and that his feelings require validation through the use of a complex measurement, such as a scale, or by a researcher's assessment of the meaning of social contact data.

Another assumption implicit in the research is that social isolation is multidimensional: that it has both quality and quantity dimensions, but that the measurement of one dimension can be substituted for the other in identifying isolated persons. Some isolation studies for example look only at frequency of contact counts. Others attempt to measure quality of relationships by collecting reports of experiences of support, closeness, intimacy or trust. These reports largely measure the presence of these relationship dimensions in an individual's life rather than the quality of them. The quality and quantity measurements of relationships are often polarized, rather than seen as integrated, interdependent dimensions of social experiences.

Symbolic Interaction Framework

These assumptions found in these approaches to studying isolation all result from one oversight: to use a theoretical framework to guide definition building, measurement and analysis of isolation experiences. Consistent adherence to one theoretical perspective might

help to resolve the apparent confusion about what social isolation is, who should identify it, what dimension of it is to be measured and what types of populations should be studied.

With this in mind, this inquiry was developed using a single theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism, to guide all stages of the research. It is appropriate to explain both this theoretical perspective and the assumptions that develop from it before using this perspective to look at literature on social isolation and farm women.

The symbolic interaction framework defines the world as an arena of interacting personalities. Each person has a position in society defined by role expectations imposed by individuals with whom he interacts and with society as a whole. These role expectations are also formed by the individual, largely through social interaction. The interactive process is ongoing between individual family and society. It facilitates the development of identity and of role making in a way that allows for change and growth in both the individual and in society.

The social environment with which the individual interacts is seen as composed of symbols, or common or shared meanings and values that guide the development of role expectations and self-definition. In this symbolic environment, the meaning attached to the situation by the individual is most important, and one's perception is a

function of social interactions which have taken place within that symbolic environment. One learns, in interaction with others, both how to classify objects with which one comes in contact and how one is expected to behave towards these objects (Stryker, 1968). Social behaviour is the product of a role-making process, that begins with role expectations but develops through interaction with others in many symbolic environments, continually changing both the form and content of interaction. A fundamental principle of symbolic interaction theory is that it is out of social relationships that the self emerges (Stryker, 1968). Interaction cannot be fully understood by means of external observation. It must be viewed in the context of how the participants define one another in the social stimulus situation.

Using this theoretical approach, several of the assumptions on which this research is based can be identified. The first assumption is that the individual's perception of her social situation is most meaningful. The second assumption is that assessment of social interactions should always be a measure of their quality as defined by the participants. And a final assumption is that one can still define oneself as socially isolated even when interacting with others on a daily basis.

The following review of literature is organized to address the major gaps in theoretical knowledge about

social isolation. It is written from the symbolic interactionist's point of view. The differentiation of loneliness and isolation concepts, a discussion of the connections made between farm women and social isolation, a perspective on the issue of what and how to measure and define isolation all lead to the development of a working definition of social isolation for this study.

Loneliness versus Social Isolation

The term social isolation has been used to describe a range of phenomena from geographic isolation (Kivett, 1978; McGhee, 1984) to individual alienation in high density urban areas (Sutcliffe & Crabbe, 1964; Wellman et al, 1971). Some authors use the terms loneliness and social isolation interchangeably, as measures of the same experience (Bahr & Garrett, 1976; Grant, 1981; Kohl, 1976; Kivett, 1978; Robinson, 1979). Other researchers point out the need to separate the experiences of loneliness and social isolation, claiming loneliness to be an effect of social isolation. Bennett (1980), Peplau and Perlman (1982) and Weiss (1973) see loneliness as a separate condition from isolation, as a psychological state often resulting from being socially isolated. Peplau and Perlman (1982) put it succinctly: "while being alone and being lonely are not synonymous, a deficiency in social contacts is a key antecedent that can lead to loneliness" (p.19). Further support for the difference between isolation and loneliness is found in a study by Servat (in

Hartog et al, 1980), who found no significant relationship between the degree of physical isolation from other people and the intensity of loneliness experiences (p.307). In his research on loneliness, Weiss (1973) concludes that "symptoms of loneliness of social isolation resemble those of loneliness of emotional isolation. Each is marked by restless depression and amorphous, unfocused dissatisfaction" (p.148). The loneliness of social isolation Weiss also found to be dominated by "boredom together with feelings of exclusion" (p.148). Weiss (1973) feels that "the prominence of boredom in the loneliness of social isolation suggests strongly that we require participation in a community of our fellows to maintain our investments in our tasks" (p.149).

The author views loneliness as an effect or consequence of social isolation. Using symbolic interaction perspective, isolation can be given a social explanation. The individual defines herself as lonely or alienated as a result of the social context in which she finds herself. The difference lies in the predictability of the experience of isolation versus that of loneliness. Isolation is not a random phenomenon, it is a result of a pattern of social interactions. The experience of loneliness is less predictable, because of the influence of personality characteristics. It could be categorized as a random phenomenon, resulting from the pattern of social interactions, or as a result of psychological disposition

or other factors.

Loneliness is not the only effect of social isolation. There is strong support in research literature for the belief that isolation may be psychologically detrimental, whether or not loneliness is actually experienced or reported (Bennett, 1980; Peplau & Perlman, 1982; Weiss, 1973). Peplau and Perlman (1982) conclude from their review of literature that social isolation is detrimental to health and life expectancy. Ross and Kedward (1976) found that for elderly people, social isolation tends to lead to institutional admission. Social network researchers have found that lack of a good confidant is associated with the presence of psychological and physical symptoms in women, especially symptoms known to be associated with depressive illness (Miller & Ingham, 1976). Steuve and Gerson (1977) in a study of over nine hundred Detroit men, claim "the nature of personal relations crucially affects both the ease with which people make lifestyle transitions and their well-being at each stage in the life course" (p.79).

Farm Women and Social Isolation

Historians, biographers and anthropologists provide accounts of farm women's experiences of social isolation (Fairbanks & Sundberg, 1983; Jensen, 1981; Kohl, 1976; Robinson, 1979; Sachs, 1983). Alberta pioneer history is rich with accounts by women of the loneliness and hardships isolation brought to their lives (Fairbanks & Sundberg,

1983; Robinson, 1979). Fairbanks and Sundberg (1983) claim "the monotony of pioneer life was intensified by the isolation of the prairie frontier" (p.72). Robinson (1979) reports that in many cases, educated women were hired by farmers' wives as domestics as much for companionship as for domestic service (p.9). An International Dry Farming Congress in Lethbridge in 1912 expressed a real concern for "the stimulation of social intercourse in rural communities" (Robinson, 1979, p.25). A columnist for a 1917 edition of the Farm and Ranch Review saw the development of the farm journal's women's page as an effort to keep women in touch with each other and with the outside world ... and to relieve the monotony of living to themselves which tells on women's nerves" (Robinson, 1979, p.33). Several writers (Robinson, 1979; Tasaka, 1978; Women of Unifarm, 1978) claim that "the most important impetus behind the formation of rural women's organizations was not ideology but rather the isolation experienced by women on pioneer homesteads" (Robinson, 1979, p.54). Unlike their husbands, few farm women had the opportunity for social contacts through their daily work (Kohl, 1976; Robinson, 1979; Tasaka, 1978). Sachs (1983) claims that the change in division of labour according to gender in the 1920's, based on the increasing use of technology in farm work, confined women to the roles of housekeeper and mother. The United States Department of Agriculture campaign to convince women of the satisfactions these roles

would bring them and the concurrent campaign to dispell myths about farm life creating mental illness reflect this change (Sachs, 1979). This trend contributed significantly to the growing dissatisfaction and feelings of isolation expressed by farm women (Jensen, 1981, p.190). Eichler (1983) supports the view that housework, however industrialized, has "led to a continuing social isolation of housewives" (p.175) because of the structural nature of the home workplace. These accounts are about the concern for farm women expressing feelings of isolation as an historical issue and they include some attempts to explain causes of these feelings. It is difficult to determine how much the historical experiences have influenced our present beliefs about farm women's lives, or to what extent the historical reality is experienced in modern farm life.

Recent studies on farm life and farm women report "isolation" and "social isolation" as a problem (Bescher-Donelly & Smith, 1981; Koski, 1982; McGhee, 1984). Several point to a gender difference between men and women in the experience of isolation, that is consistent with historical accounts: women seem to report it more frequently than men. Only one Canadian study by Grant (1981) directly addresses the issue of social isolation among rural women. Grant found that loneliness and social isolation were not "extreme problems among the population of exurbanite women" she studied in Halton County, Ontario. Grant feels there was evidence to suggest

that lack of integration of newcomers into the rural community does create a group of lonely exurbanite women whose loneliness can be partially attributed to the move to a rural area (Grant, 1981).

A recent concern expressed by researchers is the increasing work commitments of farm women as they become more involved in farm operations and employment off the farm to alleviate economic pressures (Scholl, 1982; Wilkening, 1981). Part of this concern is that increased work demands cut men and women off from social contacts and activities vital to their well-being. An opposing view is presented in McGhee's study (1984) which states that "limited employment opportunities" (p.55) may be a contributor to feelings of isolation. Data from Kivett's study (1978) show that the amount of organized social activity, such as club meetings and church, is not important to the frequency of reported loneliness among rural widows.

One outstanding feature of recent research on farm life is that social isolation is not often defined or studied. The amount that isolation is experienced by contemporary farm women, or the relationship between feelings of isolation and other hardships or demand of this lifestyle have not been examined. It is clear from a review of recent literature that despite the closeness of immediate family members some farm women feel isolated. It is this kind of isolation which this study is attempting to

identify and explain.

Friendships

The group of interest in this study are women who live in a family setting but who may still feel socially isolated. To build a working definition from the concept "deprivation of social contact and content" (Bennett, 1980), this researcher will look at social contacts outside the family group. Farm women identify their friends as important sources of emotional support, second only to their spouses (Ireland, 1983). They claim that friends because of their relative objectivity, provide the most satisfying support. Some farm women report that social relations provide their highest levels of satisfaction (The Canadian Council on Rural Development, 1979). The importance of friendships to women for both health and life satisfaction reasons is supported by a number of researchers (Baruch et al, 1983; Candy et al, 1981; Davidson & Packard, 1981; Jerrome, 1981; Kivett, 1978; Miller & Ingham, 1976; Turner, 1981). Bennett (1980) determined that for older women, the "presence of a friend may make the difference between independent living in the community and institutionalization" (p.2).

Although friendships are sometimes reported by farm women to be more satisfying social relationships than those shared with kin or immediate family members, friends are seen less frequently (Ireland, 1983). Researchers have proposed and supported the idea that it is the quality of

relationships as well as the frequency of contact that people identify as important in social relations (Kivett, 1978; Tolsdorf, 1976; Wellman et al, 1971). The issue of quality in social relationships is consistent with the theoretical construct of symbolic interactionism that describes "quality of role enactment". In her friendship role, a woman is enacting a set of role expectations that make up her "social self". Yet her social self is formed by her interaction with significant other people in her life. In symbolic interaction terms, how a farm woman defines her social situation, or her social isolation is "in large measure a function of what occurs in these intimate interactions" (Burr et al, 1979, p.49).

Social network research supports the concept of interaction between quality of relationship and definition of social self. Researchers of people's social networks in an urban Toronto study found that the quality of the relationship between friends was strongly associated with the provision of support. Frequency of contact was found to be a more important predictor of quality of relationship than geographical proximity (Wellman et al, 1971). Kivett (1978) found that the distinguishing factor between rural widows who expressed feelings of loneliness and those who did not appeared to be a difference not in the quantity of social contacts but rather in the quality of relationships.

Some of the research findings can be explained using symbolic interaction theory: a friendship relationship

defines a social role for both participants. The addition of friendship roles to those of wife, mother, farmer and employee increases a woman's positive perceptions of role enactment because of rewards resulting from that enactment. Rewards include enrichment of personality, ego gratification, role privileges, overall status security and resources for both status enhancement and role performance (Burr et al, 1979, p.81). According to the "theory of interpersonal competence" success in friendships contributes to role competence in other roles a woman performs (Burr et al, 1979, p.61).

The role of friendships in enhancing the quality of women's lives in both farm and non-farm populations suggests that friendship relationships are an important source of social contact and content. Deprivation experienced in friendship contacts and content would be a reliable measure of feelings of isolation. Furthermore, deprivation may be felt more as a result of the perceived quality of the friendship relationship, which includes a subjective evaluation of the adequacy of amount of contact, rather than as a result of actual contact time.

A Definition of Social Isolation

Bennett (1980) claims that "despite the apparent importance of isolation in studies, no direct complex measurement of it appears in large-scale surveys" (p.15). He adds that isolation is usually measured in an ad-hoc way, such as a frequency of visits count or a participation

count in a particular activity selected by the researcher. Bennett presents a number of definitions of social isolation developed over the years. Lundberg and Lawsing (1949) for example wrote that "the completely isolated individual would be one who was not chosen by anyone as an associate in any of the activities or relations of a community" (Bennett, 1980, p.10). Clausen and Kohn (1954) conceptualized isolation as the "attenuation of interpersonal relationships" and they point out the "difficulty in ascertaining what constitutes sufficient attenuation of interpersonal relationships to warrant being called isolation" (Bennett, 1980, p.11). Bennett (1980) uses the constitution of roles as the basis of his definition of isolation. Thus, social isolation is defined as "the absense of specific role relationships which are generally activated and sustained through direct personal face to face interaction" (Bennett, 1980, p.15). Bennett includes in his role inventory organizations, children, siblings, friends, relatives, mother, father, spouse and job. Weiss (1973) claims that "any severe disruption of social role is capable of producing social isolation" (p.145). He defines social isolation as "anything that leads to loss of contact with those who share one's concerns" (Weiss, 1973, p.145). Bahr and Garrett (1976) define isolation and loneliness as one concept. They include in their measurement the number of errands and activities one does alone, the presence of close friends

and of confidants, the desire to know more neighbours and to have more contact with children and reports of frequency of felt loneliness (Bahr & Garrett, 1976, p.22). Both Bennett (1980) and Bahr and Garrett (1976) mention the need to look at "voluntary" associations or contacts as opposed to the involuntary, such as paying bills and receiving medical assistance.

The similarity of all these definitions is the use of voluntary relationships with others as a central concept in the definition. The main difference is the framework within which relationships are measured: through activity, through role maintenance, through interaction, or through feelings about relationships. One of the factors missing in these definitions, although weakly implied in some, is the measure of quality of relationships. However, this group of definitions provides this study with one contribution that is consistent in most research: the friendship relationship or role is a reliable indicator for measuring feelings of isolation.

Starting with the original concept of "deprivation of social contact and content" social isolation can be quite broadly defined. It can include a measure of frequency of all voluntary interactions with family, friends, relatives and co-workers, participation in formal organizations, or contacts made in the course of conducting errands or family business. It is not viewed as a natural consequence of physical or geographic isolation. It also may include

self-reported data on experiences of loneliness, boredom or quality of relationships shared with others. It may be a subjective measure dependent on the view of the respondent, or an objective measure, prescribed by the researcher.

In developing a definition of social isolation for women living on farms, it is important to look at their life circumstances. Contact with husband and children living at home is a constant in farm women's lives, although the quality of these contacts may vary greatly among women. Farm women report their friendships as being very important to them, more important than their contacts with kin and co-workers (Ireland, 1983). For the majority of farm women, work activity is still largely centred in the home and on the farm (Ireland, 1983; McGhee, 1984). Their participation in volunteer and community activities is often an extension of family responsibilities or of friendships (Kohl, 1976).

The research on social networks, on social isolation and on friendships all support the inclusion of the concept of participation in the friendship role as a measure of isolation. Both perceived adequacy of frequency of contact and perceived quality of relationship are important features of friendships suggested by previous research.

This researcher will use the symbolic interaction perspective to create a working definition of social isolation. This perspective values the subject's definition of the situation, or perception of her own

social self. The working definition will centre on the friendship role and measure the individual's perception of the adequacy of her amount of contact with friends, her satisfaction with the overall quality of her friendships and her satisfaction with the amount of support she receives from her friends.

The definition of social isolation for this research is: "reported inadequacy of the number of contacts with one's friends; reported dissatisfaction with friendships; and reported dissatisfaction with the support one receives from friends".

Previous research is inconclusive about the merits of a conglomerate versus a multifaceted measure of social isolation. Because of the absence of direction in this area, this research will use the three parts of the definition of social isolation as three separate measures of the concept, predicting that they are in fact measuring different aspects of the experience of social isolation.

Predictors of Social Isolation

In this research, the relationship between lifestyle and feelings of isolation will be approached differently than in previous studies. Farm women are not assumed in this study to be socially isolated. Nor are there aspects of their lifestyle that one can assume explain reported feelings of isolation. Rather than look at lifestyle factors common to isolated women, this study attempts to identify predictors of feelings of isolation for farm women

as a group. The identification of predictors recognizes the relationship between changing social circumstances and feelings of isolation. People feel more or less socially isolated at different times in their lives based on their social circumstances, or patterns of social interactions. And these patterns change as a result of changes in lifestyle which result from changing patterns of participation in public and private life activities. Isolation is not a random phenomenon, but a direct consequence of meeting one's social and other needs in both private and public spheres. The predictors that could be expected to be most important are those that define lifestyle most explicitly. These would include participation in various work roles, in the parenting role, and in an intimate relationship. Other personal characteristics may also define lifestyle: one's age, one's childhood background, one's ability to handle stress and to feel in charge of one's own life. This discussion will highlight these lifestyle factors as they are found in recent literature to propose them as potential predictors of feelings of social isolation.

Several researchers describe the presence of children in the home as strong influence on the type of friendship relationships a woman develops and maintains (Hammer et al, 1982; Wellman et al., 1971). Kohl's study (1976) reports that the age of her children is a situational factor that influences a farm woman's choice of friends. The parenting

demands associated with the presence of preschool children restrict contact and provoke feelings of isolation. School-age children are thought to expand the parents' social networks by increasing their formal and informal ties in the community. There is evidence that child care demands limit a woman's involvement in farm work, which provides a way of interacting socially with other adults (Fassinger & Schwarzweller, 1982; Jones & Rosenfeld, 1981). Kohl (1976) observes that as the children mature, the woman's participation in activities outside the home changes. "The mature woman can, if she so desires, take a greater part in social activities in the community which may not be directly tied to her children's needs" (Kohl, 1976, p.62). We do not know from existing research if farm women do feel isolated when caring for preschool children at home, or if these feelings change as children increase the family's involvement in community activities and organizations. The underlying consequence of presence of children in the home is the potential restrictions it places on a woman's time for, and freedom to be with her own friends. Whether these restrictions translate into feelings of social isolation will be determined by this inquiry.

As women age, they become less involved in farm tasks (Fassinger & Schwarzweller, 1982; Jones & Rosenfeld, 1981; Scholl, 1982), and they have fewer child care responsibilities. McGhee (1984) suggests that young farm

men and women feel socially isolated because of the heavy time commitments required to get the farm enterprise established. Kivett's research (1978) highlights the negative impact of loss of work demands on the older farm woman: they feel more lonely. Kohl (1976) suggests that older women are freer to pursue social activities of their own choosing. It is actually the consequences of age then that influence feelings of isolation from friends. The consequences of youth are heavy work and child care demands that restrict time to be with friends; and the consequences of aging are restriction or loss of activity due to infirmity, or increased activity because of more free time. It is not known whether age can reliably predict feelings of isolation because of the underlying consequences. Age of farm women will be examined as a potential predictor of social isolation in this study.

Several authors suggest that women who grew up on farms have a greater commitment to the farming lifestyle because they understand what it involves (Ireland, 1983; Pearson, 1980; Sachs, 1983). Wilkening (1981) reports that farm women tend to see farming more as a way of life than as a profit-making business. Farming background in childhood describes a socialization process that includes the learning and valuing of social relationship patterns. The relationship studied here is that between the results of this socialization process and its influence on the woman's current feelings of social isolation. It is not known if

women with a farming background perceive their social situation differently from those who do not have a farming background. Farming background in childhood is included in this analysis as a potential predictor of feelings of isolation of Alberta farm women.

Brim (1974) suggests that what a person believes about her social network is likely to be an important determinant of her psychological state, regardless of the actual condition of the social network. Tolsdorf (1976) demonstrates that a sense of mastery in one's life greatly affects the development of satisfying and supportive friendships and one's perception of the usefulness and enjoyment of personal relationships. Existing research does not examine the relationship between one's feelings of mastery and feelings of isolation. However, if a sense of mastery influences one's perception of personal relationships, it may also be a reliable predictor of perceived isolation, as measured by a deprivation in quality of some personal relationships. This study will include the examination of mastery as a reliable predictor of feelings of social isolation.

The direction of causation between social network characteristics, such as frequency of contact with friends and quality of relationships, and psychological well-being has become of increasing interest to researchers (Brim, 1974; Tolsdorf, 1976). It has been shown that people who have difficulty coping with stress also have some

difficulty with friendship relationships, but the question as to which comes first has never been answered (Brim, 1974; Brim, Witcoff & Wetzel, 1982; Finlayson, 1976; Lowenthal & Haven, 1968; Tolsdorf, 1976). In this study, the question arises whether women who are feeling symptoms of stress will perceive their contact with friends differently than those who are not affected by stress. It is recognized that the experience of stress is nearly universal, but that individuals differ in their ability to deal with stressful events. Individuals also differ in their ability to share their problems with friends or to deal with friendship tensions. It is the relationship between these two abilities that underlies the examination of reported feelings of stress as a predictor of feelings of isolation.

McGhee (1984) claims in a study of Ontario farm women that there is a relationship between feelings of isolation and the limited availability of off-farm employment. Yet Scholl (1982) writes that women with advanced education who seek outside employment report decreased satisfaction with farm life, partly because of decreased involvement in farm work. Which aspect of farm life is affected, or whether it is a feeling about the lifestyle in general is not explained. The question remains whether outside employment increases the frequency and quality of social contacts for farm women. The second part of this question is whether the number of hours of involvement in off-farm employment

makes a difference, or whether it is just involvement per se. The symbolic interaction perspective on this question would be that identification with a role, and its salience would increase with increasing commitment to it. Whether the time devoted to the role is a reflection of commitment is also debatable. However, the number of hours of involvement in off-farm employment, because of the increased opportunity for social contact they provide, will be examined as a predictor of feelings of social isolation for farm women.

Other lifestyle factors included in this study are the woman's reported satisfactions with her marital relationship and with her work roles. Her assessment of the importance of her two work roles, farm work and volunteer, are also part of this group of factors. Weiss (1973) identifies the loneliness associated with isolation as precluding an "amorphous unfocused dissatisfaction" (p.148). Dissatisfaction may not only be a result of isolation, it could be a predictor. Kivett (1978) uses life satisfaction as one measure of her construct of emotional isolation (p.391). Steuve and Gerson (1977) and Miller and Ingham (1976) argue that degree of social isolation predicts satisfaction. The important question to consider in this study is the extent to which feelings of satisfaction relate to feelings of isolation in a reciprocal rather than linear fashion: is satisfaction a condition for social contact or does isolation predict

satisfaction?

Recognizing this possibility, this researcher will test the effect of satisfaction measures as predictors of social isolation. The use of self-reports of satisfaction is consistent with the symbolic interaction perspective employed in this research. The theoretical assumption underlying the presumed relationship between reports of satisfaction in work roles and in the marital relationship also comes from symbolic interactionism. The belief is that dissatisfaction experienced in one role considered to be important in life affects perceived satisfaction with other valued roles. Farm women will identify dissatisfaction with the friendship role if the marital role or a work role is a source of conflict and dissatisfaction. This trend may occur even if general life satisfaction is reported. The research literature provides some support for the influence of satisfactions resulting from participation in work and marital roles on feelings of isolation. This literature is reviewed here.

Satisfaction with the marital relationship to any woman who views her spousal role as an integral part of her identity. Farm women in Ireland's study (1983) identify their spouses as their most important sources of emotional support. Tasaka (1978) reports a study by Bloode and Wolfe that describes lower marital satisfaction scores on a number of dimensions for farm wives than for urban wives. Tasaka (1978) also quotes findings from an early study

(McVoy & Nelson, 1940) that report "less satisfaction in marital and personal relations in farm families as compared to nonfarm families" (p.22). The consequences of dissatisfaction with the marital relationship are more critical than the evidence of marital dissatisfaction. Because of the importance of this primary relationship, both to quality of life and to the functioning of the farm enterprise, it is surprising so little has been studied about the consequences of low marriage satisfaction for farming couples. The theoretical approach of this research is that dissatisfaction with marital relations will influence the perception of other social relationships. Marital dissatisfaction will colour the woman's view of her role competence in other roles she performs. The type of marital interaction she experiences will alter her social identity as she defines it. Therefore level of marital satisfaction will be analyzed as a predictor of social isolation as measured by participation in the friendship role.

A particular issue is identified in the literature that relates to marital satisfaction. It is a farm woman's satisfaction with the support she gets from her husband for her farm work. Women in the Concerned Farm Women study (Ireland, 1983) reported that the most rewarding thing about farming was the work they performed with their husbands and family (p.39). Farm labour involves a high degree of family interaction and opportunities for joint

decision-making. Wilkening and Bharadwaj (1967) found that a farm wife's involvement in farm work significantly increases her decision-making role in farm business decisions. Yet support for women's participation is not always forthcoming. Some women are frustrated by exclusion from participation in the work of the farm enterprise (Berkowitz & Perkins, 1984; Pearson, 1980; Sachs, 1983). Disagreement about a woman's role with respect to farm work has been a source of stress for many farm families (Berkowitz & Hedlund, 1979; Berkowitz & Perkins, 1984; Sachs, 1983). Part of a husband's support for a woman's involvement in farm work is recognition of her contribution. Symes and Marsden (1983) report that there is too often a "casualisation" of the wife's contribution to the family firm (p.239). Bescher-Donnelly and Smith (1981) also see lack of recognition for the roles they perform as a major issue for farm women. Husband's support of his wife's farm work is one expression of the quality of the marital relationship. It is also a special type of interaction where lack of recognition or experiences of conflict would influence the woman's definition of herself and her role competence. These interaction dealing with woman's involvement in farm work must have some effect on the woman's participation in satisfying friendships. Husband's support of his wife's farm work will be examined as a predictor of feelings of social isolation in this study.

Strongly linked to the concept of husband's support for her involvement in farm work, is the farm woman's own valuing of farm work. One measure cannot be studied without the other. Scholl (1982) claims that numerous studies have been done on the labour of farm women but few have asked how they feel about farm work and the rewards and importance it holds for them. Some women do not feel farm work is an important part of their lives, and prefer not to do it. Pearson (1980) claims her interviews of farm women "consistently suggest that a woman's self-image plays a key role in determining her attitude toward farm work" (p.184). Pearson's (1980) analysis is that differences in attitudes toward farm work may be "linked directly to the sex role definitions with which women most closely identify" (p.176). Pearson (1980) adds that women who value farm work do not "agonize over the limitations farm work imposes on their performance in more traditional spheres of activity: home, church, school and community" (p.176), hence they are less likely to feel socially isolated. Because of its relationship to measurements of satisfaction with the spousal relationship and also its potential direct impact on feelings of social isolation, the concept 'importance of farm work' will be analyzed as a predictor variable in this study.

Studies on farm women have one common theme: most farm women carry a heavy work load. Current research highlights the triad of work roles performed by many farm wives: in

the home, on the farm and in off-farm employment (Huffman, 1976; Ireland, 1983; Jones & Rosenfeld, 1981; Koski, 1982; Light, 1984; Maret & Chenoweth, 1979; McGhee, 1984; Scholl, 1982; Scholl, 1983b; The Council on Rural Development, 1979; Wilkening, 1981). One significant work role is often overlooked. Many farm women contribute many hours each year to volunteer service in the community. For many, their participation in organized social groups, many of which are service-oriented, becomes the most common way to develop and maintain friendship ties (Kohl, 1978, p.42).

Koski (1982) reports in the National Farmers Union Study that farm women ranked highest on satisfaction scales the farm tasks they performed. Farm women in Ontario (Ireland, 1983) considered their contributions to the farm important and stated they "derived great satisfaction from the work they were doing" (p.49). Coughenaur and Swanson (1983) also report that "farming is considered a desireable and pleasureable activity by those who practice it" (p.25). Scholl (1982) reports that women who seek outside employment decrease their farm work involvement and report decreased satisfaction with farm life. She did not measure their satisfaction with their off-farm employment.

Women's identification of the importance of household work to the farm enterprise and the personal satisfactions this work brings is well documented (Coward & Smith, 1981; Ireland, 1983; Jevne, 1984; Jones & Rosenfeld, 1981; McGhee, 1984; Scholl, 1982; Scholl, 1983b). This

phenomenon is consistent with the satisfactions reported by urban women about their household work and childcare duties (Baruch et al., 1983). Farm women studied also rate their volunteer work as important in their lives (Ireland, 1983; McGhee, 1984). Whether it is important because of the work itself or the social interaction it provides has not been determined. Accounts of pioneer women's work roles relate that some farm women found their responsibilities as "useful buffers between themselves and the loneliness of the frontier, while others appreciated the freedom and opportunity resulting from their work" (Fairbanks & Sundberg, 1983, p.86). Farm women in Alberta have been active in social reform activities throughout the century because of the opportunities for social interaction and involvement that this type of volunteer work entails (Robinson, 1979; Tasaka, 1978).

The modern image of farm women shared by the general population is that of housewife who decides to work off the farm when economics demand it or when she gets lonely. This study recognizes the farm woman's four work roles: household work, farm work, volunteer work and off-farm employment. Two of the roles usually observed in the modern farm woman image, that of farm worker and community volunteer have been included in this analysis in terms of role salience and satisfaction with the work of that role as reported by the farm woman. The theoretical assumption is that both the importance of these roles and the

experiences of satisfaction they bring are important to the social identity of the farm woman. They also provide her with special types of social interactions different from those occuring in household work and off-farm employment. These interactions contribute to her feelings of role competence, and to her perception of her social situation. They therefore should predict her feelings of social isolation.

The special feelings farm women have for their household role may similarly have significant impact on their social-self definition and their participation in friendships.

Off-farm employment is seen as a new role for farm women, when actually it has been a phenomenon occuring throughout farming history in Alberta (Robinson, 1984). Never before however have so many farm women been employed either part-time or full-time off the farm (Light, 1984). The increase in involvement in off-farm labour may be a direct consequence of economic conditions. It may also be an attempt by farm women to deal with some of their feelings of social isolation. Satisfaction felt in performing this work role will be analyzed as a predicttor of feelings of social isolation.

The final measure of life satisfaction particularly relevant to farm women is an assessment of feelings about farming as a way of life. Wilkening (1981) suggests that farm women tend to see farming more as a way of life than

as just a business. This reflects their heavy commitment to their multiple work roles that keep the enterprise operational (Scholl, 1983b). Farm life means work for most farm women but it also means other things. The contact with nature, the independence, family togetherness, open spaces and privacy are all reasons cited for satisfaction with the farm lifestyle both historically and in modern contexts (Binnie-Clark, 1979; Ireland, 1983; Jensen, 1981; Jevne, 1984; McGhee, 1984; Meyers & Pitzer, 1984; Pearson, 1980; Sachs, 1983; Wilkening, 1981).

The modern farm family faces many economic stresses that make farming a less than ideal way to make a living (Rosenblatt & Keller, 1983). Yet many families hang on to this way of life and endure economic hardships to receive other satisfactions. It is possible that these other satisfactions associated with the farming lifestyle contribute rewards to role enactment that alter a farmer's perception of her social situation and of herself. The farming lifestyle may provide a symbolic environment in which the meaning and value of social contact and content is different. In this inquiry, a farm woman's satisfaction with farming as a way of life will be measured as a predictor of three separate measures of social isolation.

Hypotheses

1. Social Isolation

1.1. Most farm women in the sample will not report feelings of social isolation as measured by perceived adequacy of amount of contact with friends.

1.2. Most farm women in the sample will not report satisfaction with their friendships: they feel socially isolated.

1.3. Most farm women in the sample will not report satisfaction with a measure of support they receive from their friends: they feel socially isolated.

2. Predictors of Social Isolation

2.1. There are no lifestyle factors which predict feelings of social isolation in this sample of Alberta farm women as measured by perceived adequacy of amount of contact with friends.

2.2. There are no lifestyle factors which predict feelings of social isolation in this sample of Alberta farm women as measured by reported satisfaction with friendships.

2.3. There are no lifestyle factors which predict feelings of social isolation in this sample of Alberta farm women as measured by reported satisfaction with friends' help to cope with tensions.

Lifestyle Factors:

age

farm background

feelings of mastery

feelings of stress

parenting role

off-farm employment

satisfaction with off-farm employment

marital satisfaction

importance of farm work

satisfaction with farm work

satisfaction with support from husband for farm work

satisfaction with household work

satisfaction with farming lifestyle

importance of volunteer work

satisfaction with volunteer work

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

Population

This study is conducted as part of a larger research project, A Study of Alberta Farmers, developed by two faculty members, Drs. Maryanne Doherty and Norah Keating, of the Faculty of Home Economics, University of Alberta. A Study of Alberta Farmers is funded by the Agricultural Research Council of Alberta through the Farming for the Future research grant program. The population identified for the project was Alberta grain and oil seed farmers who are both farm owners and operators. The farmers receive at least fifty-one percent of their farm income from crop sales and own a farm which is at least twenty acres in size.

Sample

Two stratified random samples of fifteen hundred households were drawn for the study from a population of 44,227 grain farm households by Statistics Canada. The sample is stratified by region, following eight crop regions designated by Alberta Agriculture. The sample group was identified using 1981 census data. The researchers are unaware of the identities of members of the sample group: a mailed survey questionaire was sent directly from the Statistics Canada regional office. The first sample group received the survey in November 1984, and the second sample surveys were sent by mail in January,

1985.

The study presented in this thesis, Social Isolation of Alberta Farm Women, uses a subsample of the larger study, A Study of Alberta Farmers. It is composed of adult females in farm households who reside on the farm and who completed a questionnaire.

Survey Instrument

A Study of Alberta Farmers researchers developed three questionnaires with a total of 142 items centering on the areas of farm families' work, their feelings about their work and experiences of stress. The questionnaire was developed after extensive study of literature. During the development of the instrument, the researchers compared questions to those asked by researchers in similar studies.

Many of the measures used in this instrument, while based on concepts that have been used previously, have never been used in their present form. To establish face validity, drafts of the questionnaire were shared with knowledgeable people in the fields of survey research, rural sociology and home economics. They provided advice on format of the questionnaires and the content of questions. Drafts of the questionnaires were also used in pilot tests with three groups of farm men and women. A principal researcher was in attendance to answer questions and receive feedback about the questionnaires. Both these consultation steps increase the probability that the questions measure what they are intended to measure and

helped to establish face validity.

Since the instrument is largely original in format and content, no measures of reliability are available for the items included. Reliability tests for scales measuring specific constructs, such as stress and mastery, were not carried out. Previous researchers had established both reliability and validity for the mastery scale (Pearlin et al, 1981).

The foci of A Study of Alberta Farmers are the workloads, both farm and off-farm, of both the farm operator and the spouse; the economic and personal stresses resulting from the demands of production and from their lifestyle; and the roles that friends and spouse have in supporting that lifestyle.

The survey instrument consists of three parts: a questionnaire for the male head of the farm household; an identical questionnaire for the female head of the household; and a questionnaire on farm size, activity, ownership, financing and employees to be completed by the farm owner. This provided four possible units of analysis for the study: the farming couple, the farm owner (when different from members of the farming couple), the farm man, and the farm woman.

The package received by each farm household included the survey instrument, a letter of introduction explaining the study, an instruction sheet, a stamped self-addressed envelope, and a postcard for requesting study results.

A reminder postcard was mailed to all recipients of surveys three weeks following the initial mailing to encourage more questionnaires to be returned. The mailed survey method of distribution was selected to allow researchers to draw a truly representative and large sample from a geographically wide-spread population.

Measurement

Dependent Variables

The concept of feelings of social isolation is measured in three ways. This multiple measurement is suggested by the experience of previous researchers: the measure of quality in social relationships, while being a more reliable indicator of isolation, is also more complex. The assumption here is that various measures of quality may differ. So each of the three measures is treated as a separate dependent variable to see if similar or different response patterns result.

The measures of social isolation are created using the construct "contact with friends", as explained in the theoretical review. The specific questions which assess quality aspects of contact with friends are:

1. Do you see your friends as often as you would like?
2. Overall how satisfied are you with your friendships?
3. Overall how satisfied are you with the way your friends help you cope with your tensions?

Question one is designed to measure perceived adequacy of amount of contact with friends. It is a self-report

dichotomous (yes/no) response that reflects a feeling about frequency of contact, or perception of it, as opposed to a measure of self-reported frequency of contact, such as number of visits or phone calls per week. As a measure of perception, it reflects the framework of this study: that the meaning of the situation, as defined by the respondent, is more important than meaning attached by the researcher to self-reported quantifiable facts, recognizing that all self-reported data reflect a personal attachment of meaning. This framework of symbolic interaction recognizes the unique context within which each individual lives. A woman's definition of her situation is more appropriate a measurement of feelings of isolation than a description of the circumstances from which she develops her definition.

Questions two and three measure the quality of content of friendships as perceived by farm women. The constructs of feeling satisfied with friendships and perceived support from friends, in this case specifically defined as help to cope with tensions, are developed in previous research (Candy, Troll & Levy, 1981; Davidson & Packard, 1981; Finlayson, 1976; Kivett, 1978; Tolsdorf, 1976). The responses to these two questions are ratings on a five point Likert-type scale, ranging from "very unsatisfied" to "very satisfied". They will be analyzed as two separate dependent variables.

Independent Variables

The independent variables, or predictor variables, have been selected based on a review of existing research. They include measures that describe a woman's personal characteristics such as age, farm background, parenting role and employment status. They include her self-report answers on both a stress scale and a mastery scale. Satisfaction variables are self-reported feelings of satisfaction about the marital relationsip, work roles and farming as a way of life. This group of variables includes an item on the importance of farm work and one on the importance of volunteer work to the farm woman.

The stress scale and the mastery scale are pre-tested reliable scales that result in a single cumulative score for these concepts. All other independent variables are single question items on the questionaire. Some, like age of respondent and whether she grew up on a farm, are responses to direct questions. Others, such as average hours of off-farm employment per month and parenting role, are calculated using questionnaire data. Parenting role for example is determined by the age of the youngest child still living at home. All satisfaction variable responses and the importance of farm work and volunteer work responses are recorded on Likert-type scales by the respondent.

Summary

Dependent variables:

1. perceived adequacy of amount of contact with friends

   (Do you see your friends as often as you would like?)

2. satisfaction with friendships

   (Overall how satisfied are you with your friendships?)

3. satisfaction with support from friends

   (Overall how satisfied are you with the way your friends help you cope with your tensions?)

Independent variables:

age	- (How old are you?)
farm background	- (Did you grow up on a farm?)
feelings of mastery	- (7 question scale: see Appendix)
feelings of stress	- (11 question scale: see Appendix)
parenting role	- (Please complete the following information about your children: sex, age, living at home?)
off-farm employment	- (For each month give the number of hours in which you did paid off-farm work.)
marital satisfaction	- (Overall, how satisfied are you with your marriage?)
satisfaction with off-farm employment	- (How much personal satisfaction did you receive from your off-farm paid work?)
importance of farm work	- (How important to you is your farm work?)
satisfaction with farm work	- (How much personal satisfaction do you receive from your farm work?)
satisfaction with farming lifestyle	- (How satisfied are you with farming as a way of life?)

satisfaction with support from husband for farm work	- (How satisfied are you with the amount of support or understanding your spouse gives you in regard to your farm work?)
satisfaction with household work	- (How much personal satisfaction do you receive from your household work?)
importance of volunteer work	- (How important to you is your volunteer work?)
satisfaction with volunteer work	- (How much personal satisfaction do you receive from your volunteer work?)

Data Analysis

Frequency distributions for the three measures of the dependent variable, social isolation, will be calculated to determine if Alberta farm women feel socially isolated.

The relationship between the dependent variables and the predictor or independent variables will be analyzed using a stepwise multiple regression technique. This method will determine the relative importance of independent variables in predicting social isolation. It will also determine if the effects of two or more independent variables are additive for this particular sample.

Multiple regression technique is a descriptive tool by which the linear dependence of one variable (satisfaction with friendships or satisfaction with frequency of contact with friends) on others (lifestyle factors and other satisfactions) is summarized. It allows for deletion of independent variables that do not contribute substantially

to prediction accuracy once certain independent variables are included. The main focus of this analysis is the measurement of overall dependence of a variable on a set of other variables and examination of the relationship between each dependent variable and a particular independent variable. The aim of this analysis is to develop a new understanding about the factors which contribute to farm women's isolation.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter reports the demographic characteristics of the sample. Results are presented in answer to each research question: frequency distributions to show if Alberta farm women feel socially isolated; and some correlational data and results of the multiple regression analysis to determine predictors of isolation for the sample group.

Sample Characteristics

The sample group was selected by including only the adult females who responded to the questionnaire and who also reported that they lived on the farm. The response rate for all farm women was 11%. This resulted in a final sample for this study of two hundred and eighty-eight (288) women living on grain farms in Alberta.

The mean size of farms for this sample based on acres owned is 743.78 acres, and the average net farm income is $22,272.

The mean age of the women in the sample group is 42 years (Table I). Ninety-five percent of the women are married (Table II). Eighty-five percent of the sample have senior high school education or better (Table III). Sixty-six percent of the respondents grew up on farms (Table IV).

Sixty-six percent of the sample report having children age twenty-four and under living at home (Table V). Mean

number of children per woman is 2.9 (Table VI). Thirty-four percent of the respondents report they do off-farm paid work, and for those reporting income from this work, the mean gross income is $8,204.

Average hours per month devoted to each work role: farm work, household work, off-farm paid work and volunteer work, is found in Table VII.

Table I

Age of Farm Women

Age in Years	Frequency	Percent
20-30	49	17.0
31-40	92	32.0
41-50	75	26.0
51-60	46	16.0
61-70	23	8.0
71-80	3	1.0
Total	288	100.0

mean age = 42 years

Table II

Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Married	276	95.8
Common Law	3	1.0
Never Married	0	0.0
Widowed	7	2.4
Separated	1	0.4
Divorced	1	0.4
Total	288	100.0

Table III

Education Level Achieved

Level Achieved	Frequency	Percent
Elementary	9	3.2
Junior High	32	11.2
Senior High	132	46.3
Technical/Vocational	74	26.0
University Degree (undergraduate)	27	9.5
University Degree (graduate)	11	3.8
Total	285	100.0

Table IV

Farming History

	Frequency	Percent
Grew up on a farm	190	66.0
Other background	98	34.0
Total	288	100.0

Table V

Age of youngest child living at home

Age of youngest child	N	% of respondents
0-5	64	33.9
6-12	59	31.2
13-18	54	28.6
19-24	12	6.3
Total	189	100.0

Table VI

Number of Children

Number	Frequency	Percent
0	19	6.6
1	31	10.8
2	77	26.7
3	72	25.0
4	56	19.4
5	13	4.5
6	9	3.1
7	2	0.7
8	3	1.1
9	3	1.1
10	2	0.7
11	0	0.0
12	1	0.3
Total	288	100.0

mean number of children 2.9

Table VII

Time in Work Roles

Work type	N	% of sample	Average hours per month
Farm Work	246	85.4	55.8
Household Work	248	86.1	295.5
Off-farm paid work	97	33.7	66.9
Volunteer work	173	60.1	12.6
Total	288	100.0	

Answers to Research Questions

1. Do Alberta farm women feel socially isolated?

Three hypotheses were formulated to address this question.

Hypothesis 1.1: Most farm women in the sample will not report feelings of social isolation as measured by perceived adequacy of amount of contact with friends.

Results: In response to the survey question:

Do you see your friends as often as you would like?

56.3% of the respondents reported "no"

43.7% of the respondents reported "yes" (N=288)

The frequency distribution shows that the majority of the women do report social isolation as measured by perceived adequacy of amount of contact with friends.

Hypothesis 1.1 is rejected based on these data.

Hypothesis 1.2: Most farm women in the sample will not report satisfaction with their friendships: they feel socially isolated.

Results: Responses to the question "Overall how satisfied are you with your friendships?" showed the distribution:

	Scale value	Percent	
Very unsatisfied	1	2.7	
	2	3.8	n=288
Satisfied	3	18.1	
	4	39.6	
Very satisfied	5	35.8	

mean scale response=4.0

The distribution of responses on the scale demonstrate that most farm women (93.5%) feel satisfied to some degree about their friendships. The level of reported overall satisfaction with friendships means that most farm women do not feel socially isolated.

Hypothesis 1.2 is rejected based on these results.

Hypothesis 1.3: Most farm women in the sample will not report satisfaction with a measure of support they receive from their friends: they feel socially isolated.

Results: Responses to the question "Overall how satisfied are you with the way your friends help you cope with your tensions?" had the distribution:

	Scale value	Percent	
Not applicable	0	7.0	
Very unsatisfied	1	2.5	n=285
	2	8.1	
Satisfied	3	25.3	
	4	32.6	
Very satisfied	5	24.6	

mean scale response=3.5

Most farm women (82.5%) report satisfaction with the way their friends help them to cope with their tensions. This report of satisfaction with support from friends shows these women do not feel socially isolated.

Hypothesis 1.3 is rejected based on these data.

If the question on perceived adequacy of contact with friends was the only measure of social isolation, one might conclude that 56.3% of the sample do in fact feel isolated. But the high level of overall satisfaction with friendships and the degree of satisfaction reported for friends' support far outweigh the concerns about adequacy of contact. The answer to the research question "Do Alberta farm women feel socially isolated?" is that overall, considering the responses to all three questions, this group of Alberta farm women does not feel socially isolated, although 56.5% of the group reported they do not see their friends as often as they would like.

2. Are there specific lifestyle factors or experiences that reliably predict feelings of isolation for Alberta farm women?

Three hypotheses were developed to address this question.

Hypothesis 2.1: There are no lifestyle factors which predict feelings of social isolation in this sample of Alberta farm women as measured by perceived adequacy of amount of contact with friends.

Results: Results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis showed no significant predictors of feelings of isolation as measured by perceived adequacy of amount of contact with friends.

Hypothesis 2.1 was not rejected based on the results of this analysis.

Hypothesis 2.2: There are no lifestyle factors which predict feelings of social isolation in this sample of Alberta farm women as measured by reported satisfaction with friendships.

Results: Results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis showed one significant predictor of feelings of isolation as measured by reported satisfaction with friendships. This predictor is marital satisfaction. Results are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Step-wise Multiple Regression Analysis:
overall satisfaction with friendships
as a dependent variable

satisfaction with marital relationship ——— .407 ⟶ Overall satisfaction with friendships

R^2 = .166

These results use the beta weights (normalized regression coefficients) from multiple regression equations in which satisfaction with friendships is the dependent variable and all lifestyle factors and satisfaction measures are independent variables.

The values of the beta weights represent the fraction of the change in standard deviations of the dependent variables attributable to each of the independent variables listed when all other independent variables are held constant.

R^2 is the estimate of amount of variance shared by the variables.

Hypothesis 2.2 is rejected based on these results.

Hypothesis 2.3: There are no lifestyle factors which predict feelings of social isolation in this sample of Alberta farm women as measured by reported satisfaction with friends' help to cope with tensions.

Results: Stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed no significant predictors of feelings of social isolation as measured by reported satisfaction with friends' help to cope with tensions.

Hypothesis 2.3 is not rejected on the basis of these findings.

The answer to the research question "Are there specific lifestyle factors or experiences that reliably predict feelings of social isolation for Alberta farm women?" is that there is one lifestyle factor, marital satisfaction, which predicts feelings of isolation as measured by reported overall satisfaction with friendships.

Significant Correlations

The Pearson product correlations between each independent variable and dependent variable show some relationships between variables which did not appear in the step-wise multiple regression analysis. The correlations with coefficients higher than r=.13 are presented in Table VIII in Appendix B. Satisfaction with farming as a way of life in association with overall satisfaction with friendships (r=.3258) was the only significant correlation which did not appear in multiple regression analysis as a predictor of social isolation.

A Test for Reciprocal Causation

A separate step-wise multiple regression analysis was conducted to address the possibility that dependent and independent variables measuring satisfaction were locked into a relationship of reciprocal causation. It was felt by the researcher that satisfaction with farming as a way of life may be a useful conglomerate measure of life satisfactions to test as a potential latent variable in the

relationship between life satisfaction measures and satisfaction with friendships. This assumption was based on the rationale that women on farms identify marital relations and work roles as major components of their way of life. Thus satisfaction in one or more of these components should predict satisfaction with farming as a way of life. If the predictors that emerge in this analysis are different than those that predict social isolation as measured by satisfaction with friendships, the conclusion can be made that reciprocal causation, or the possibility that independent variables and dependent variables were tapping the same general feelings of satisfaction, is not an issue in this study. The results presented in Figures 2 and 3 (Appendix B) show that reciprocal causation is not necessarily occuring for measures of satisfaction reported by this sample group.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to develop a definition of social isolation; to determine if Alberta farm women feel socially isolated; and to analyze the influence of various lifestyle factors on measures of feelings of social isolation. This research was conducted from a symbolic interaction perspective that views the individual's perception and definition of the situation as more relevant than an objective measure or outsider's observation. The results included characteristics of the sample group; distributions showing frequencies of reported feelings of isolation; and results of a multiple regression analysis to determine predictors of social isolation. This chapter presents a discussion on the major findings and some of their implications. It also suggests some directions for future research.

Sample Characteristics

This study's sample represents a broad cross-section of adult women living on grain farms in seven regions of Alberta. There is a wide variance in age, and in family and work careers among the women in the sample group. Whether they are truly representative of the population the research was designed to study is influenced by several limitations. One is the use of a mailed self-report survey for data collection, which usually means only those people most motivated to reply complete the questionnaire. The

low return rate may also be a result of difficulties in understanding and completing the questionnaire, or its length. The sample group had a higher than average education level compared to the general population. Both the education level of the women and the motivational factors involved in participating in the study could lead one to conclude that the group was on the whole, above average relative to the population from which it was drawn. In a study of social isolation, however, this finding strengthens confidence in the results, particularly with respect to the predictors of social isolation.

Answers to Research Questions

1. Feelings of Social Isolation

All three hypotheses about farm women's feelings of social isolation were rejected based on the findings of this study. The majority (56.3%) of the sample group felt that they do not see their friends as often as they would like. The two measures of satisfaction with friendships were fairly high for the group (means of 4.0 and 3.5 on a five-point Likert-type scale). Therefore most sample members do not feel isolated, although most farm women would like to see their friends more often. The response to the research question "Do Alberta farm women feel socially isolated" is that Alberta farm women as a group do not feel socially isolated although some individuals do.

A definition of social isolation included three measures of quality to reflect the three important aspects

of sharing a social relationship: perceived adequacy of amount of contact, overall satisfaction with the relationship, and satisfaction with support received in the relationship. The differences in the distributions of responses to the three measures of isolation supports the researcher's belief that the three constructs measuring perceived quality of relationships are separate measures of isolation which cannot be combined. As suggested by previous research (Kivett, 1979) perceived adequacy of amount of contact is an important measure of quality of relationships, but should not be the only measure. It would be interesting to determine the relationship between perceived frequency of contact and actual frequency of contact and to what extent reports of satisfaction with friendships are functions of each frequency measure.

The three different frequency patterns that the three measures of isolation display were predictable. It is not surprising that most farm women, with their heavy work loads and busy family lives, wish they could see their friends more often than they do. Most people who balance several work roles, as well as family and community responsibilities could be expected to wish for more opportunities or time for contact with friends, particularly because of the rewards that enactment of the friendship role holds.

The perceived adequacy of contact with friends is different from other quality measures of friendships in one

way: it is a shared property of the relationship, whereas other quality measures are largely dependent on properties of individuals who make up the relationship. Therefore, a woman who perceives her frequency of contact with a friend as inadequate sees the relationship as inadequate, not the friend. It is an inadequacy she can herself assist to improve. But a woman who sees her friendship or the help she receives from friends as unsatisfactory is concerned about the inadequacy of the person with whom she shares the relationship, or with the content of their interactions. The differences in the three quality measures of isolation result from their sources. Adequacy of contact is a consequence of lifestyle choices and limitations, which can be changed to some extent. Satisfaction with friendships and friends' support are content measures that are a consequence of personal qualities of the people involved in the interaction.

The differences in patterns of responses to the measures are not unusual, following this analysis. The measure of overall satisfaction with friendships showed the highest average level of satisfaction. Most people choose for their friends people with qualities similar to their own. And symbolic interaction theory supports the view that one's identity is defined by the content of interactions with others. In a sense, expressing satisfaction with one's friends is an expression of self-satisfaction.

The fact that farm women report on average lower satisfaction with friends' support to cope with tensions than overall satisfaction with friendships is also not surprising. Women in Ireland's (1983) study report their husbands are their most important source of emotional support. It is possible that tensions experienced by farm women are best understood by their husbands, who share the same pressures of the family enterprise and of family life. Farm women may see their friends' support role quite differently: friends are to share or exchange practical support in the form of labour, goods or services, or to support one in one's interests, hobbies and on special occasions. So responses to this question may reflect two trends: a tendency to be less satisfied with friend's help to cope with tensions relative to the support received from a spouse; and the perception that the kind of support appropriate to friendships may be quite different than the type of support (to cope with tensions) proposed by the question. The other possibility is that farm women do not feel they need help for the tensions they experience. This in fact may be why twenty women indicated that the question was "not applicable" to them.

One of the types of isolation which cannot be identified by using this study's definition of social isolation is geographic isolation. The theoretical approach of this study is that the consequences of geographic isolation as perceived by the respondents are

more important than the fact of geographical isolation: consequences such as the ability to see friends as often as one wishes. Responses to all three measures of isolation that make up the definition may be a consequence of geographic isolation, or of other circumstances. The definition of social isolation developed for this study centred on measurement of quality of contact and content of friendships. In the absence of any accepted definitions or significant theoretical developments in social isolation research, this concept of social isolation was created from the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. The originality of the three part concept is a limitation of this study because it has not been tested before. A strength of the concept is its use of a universally understood term "friends", with which most people can identify. Another strength of the concept as it was developed is that it asks respondents to directly report feelings, making it free of researcher bias in interpretation.

2. Predictors of Social Isolation

In the multiple regression analysis, satisfaction with the marital relationship emerged as the predictor of overall satisfaction with friendships.

These results can be interpreted in several ways. Some researchers suggest that a good marital relationship is a precursor to feelings of satisfaction with other relationships in one's life (Fehr & Perlman, 1984). Social

network researchers have found that the skills for and attitude towards good relationships are consistent in associations with all network members, both intimate and companionate (Tolsdorf, 1976). Therefore people who are able to develop satisfying marriages are also able to create satisfying friendships. A symbolic interactionist perspective would be that the two types of relationship activity might hold the same symbolic meaning to the individual, or they are perceived the same way, whether or not they truly are the same. Therefore a woman happy with her marriage would view all personal relations as fulfilling and rewarding. An alternate explanation might be the identification with role expectations: a farm woman will report satisfied feelings about roles such as wife and friend, because they are supposed to be satisfying roles. Her positive identification with role expectations is a critical part of her identity.

The absence of other predictors of social isolation is due to low correlations between dependent and independent variables. The only significant correlation that did not appear in a multiple regression equation was the association between satisfaction with farming as a way of life and satisfaction with friendships. Satisfying friendships may be a significant contributor to satisfaction with way of life. Or a symbolic interaction perspective might be that a woman who sees her general lifestyle as enjoyable and satisfying would be more

disposed to see her interactions with friends in the same way.

The issue of reciprocal causation in reported experiences of satisfaction was addressed by doing a multiple regression analysis using satisfaction with farming as a way of life as the dependent variable and all other measures of satisfaction as predictors or independent variables. This analysis was used to determine the possibility that satisfaction with friendships actually predicts other satisfactions, because the satisfaction measures are undifferentiated, or tapping the same feeling of general life satisfaction. The results of this analysis show that sample members did differentiate between the satisfactions experienced in different aspects of their lives. The results of this analysis (found in Figures 2 and 3 in Appendix B) are important for they point to a new direction for social isolation research: the relationship between involvement in personally satisfying work and feelings of social isolation. In this multiple regression equation, personal satisfaction with farm work and satisfaction with husband's support for off-farm employment were the predictors of satisfaction with farming as a way of life. Several authors feel that a woman who describes farm labour as rewarding and important, and who incorporates what is socially ascribed as masculine activity into her feminine identity is not as likely to feel isolated living on the farm (Jenson, 1981: Pearson,

1980: Robinson, 1979: Sachs, 1983). The companionate nature of farm work as opposed to household work and the particular rewards and satisfactions farm work holds have been suggested as reasons for this observation.

A husband's support for a woman's off-farm work may be an expression of marital relationship quality. But another interpretation may be that some of the satisfactions that off-farm work holds are the recognition and support offered by the husband for the wife's contribution to the family business: a type of reward no different than that found in recognition received from one's colleagues in the outside work force. Spousal support may be also measured by the lack of conflict or disagreement present in the relationship about the off-farm work the woman performs or the role she has in the family as a wage-earner. Women feel there is support for what they do because their work force participation is viewed as natural and normal.

Satisfaction with farming as a way of life correlates significantly with overall satisfaction with friendships in this study. If the predictors of satisfaction with the farming lifestyle are personal satisfaction with farm work and satisfaction with husband's support of off-farm work, then a possible relationship between involvement in farm work and feelings of isolation, and between conflict-free participation in off-farm work and feelings of isolation is supported by this study. A conclusion can be made that a woman who is busy balancing four work roles does not

necessarily feel socially isolated, as measured by contact and content of friendships. But a woman who cannot do the work she wants to do without experiencing conflict or frustration will feel isolated from her friends. In summary, a woman who enjoys farming as a way of life is less likely to report feelings of social isolation. But the most important aspects of the farming life appear to be work-role issues: her involvement in farm work and support from her spouse for work she does off the farm. Work role salience and satisfactions and spousal support of her work roles appear to be important mediators between a farm woman's lifestyle circumstances and her experiences of isolation.

3. Who is the isolated farm woman?

A composite profile of a farm woman who does not feel socially isolated would be a woman who is very satisfied with her marital relationship and who is involved in and enjoys farm work. If she works off the farm, her husband supports her to her satisfaction in this role. Berkowitz and Perkins' (1984) research has a related finding, considering role conflict and experiences of stress. They found the presence of a supportive husband may mediate or reduce the role conflicts and stress experienced by farm women. What both this study and the Berkowitz and Perkins research may be tapping is the issue of husband and wife's agreement about and appreciation of the wife's work roles, both on the farm and off. The ability to work out

misunderstandings about work roles and to be supportive to each other is dependent on the quality of the marital relationship. Berkowitz and Perkins (1984) state that the literature on role conflict points to the possibility that the social or interactional context in which roles are performed is more important to the experience of conflict than the actual content of roles. It is likely that the marital relationship is a predictor of experiences of isolation because of the underlying psychological climate provided by the marriage in which a farm woman's roles are valued and performed. The non-isolated person is one for whom the role conflicts are for the most part worked out, with the help and understanding of a supportive spouse.

The composite picture of a farm woman who feels isolated is one who does not feel her needs are met in her marital relationship or in her farm work role. She is a person who performs her multiple roles of farmer, housekeeper, volunteer, and often employee, without a feeling of their importance, a feeling of satisfaction, or a feeling of support for her work from her husband. She feels she is helping him with his farm, rather than involved as an equal partner in the family enterprise. This interpretation is strongly supported by the views of five farm women interviewed following the collection and analysis of survey data (see Appendix C).

Implications of these Findings

If feelings of isolation stem from the marital

relationship and work role conflicts, what can be done to reduce a farm woman's isolation?

The interdependency and partnership aspects of the marital relationship and of the performance of work roles need to be addressed. Whether in farm management courses or in marital enrichment or counselling programs in which they participate together, the farming couple must clarify the farm wife's roles, their importance to the operation, and to her. The most important source of recognition and support for the farm woman appears to be her husband. Unlike most urban dwellers, for whom participation in public life in the areas of work and some social activity is separate from the household, the farm is a place where the public and private lives of farm people blur together: it is their place of business as well as their home. This fact places special demands on the farm couple's marital relationship. It becomes a relationship where needs more usually met by outsiders in the public sphere, must in part be met in their private lives. The most overlooked source of identity for farm women is their own self-definition. This definition is formed by the interactions between the woman and her husband and family but also by interactions with society as a whole. Society does not identify farm women as farmers, yet the farm work role is central to their lives. Farm women must feel isolated by the incongruence of their identities in their private and public lives. Both this lack of recognition by the public

for who they are and what they do, as well as the limited time farm women have for participation in a life away from family and work explain the strong relationships that have emerged in this research between marital and work satisfactions and feelings of social isolation. A farm woman's social self definition, as an isolated or non-isolated person, is as much a product of her private life as it is the life she shares with others outside the family.

Suggestions for Further Research

The development and results of this thesis lead to several areas where further research is needed.

1. Theoretical and Methodological Issues

More work is needed in developing useful definitions and ways of measuring social isolation, particularly for the farm population. In particular, the value of using participation in one or more social roles as measures of isolation requires further testing. The effectiveness of measuring quality of relationships as defined by the respondent as opposed to construction of more objective measures , such as frequency of visits with friends to define isolation also needs more study. We do not know whether the perception of one's social situation as identified in feelings of social isolation reflects the reality of one's social life or of one's personality.

Because there are few studies that measure the effects of isolation on people, it is difficult to identify

isolated persons living on farms except by asking them. A study of the effects of isolation on people, its symptomology, and of behavioural characteristics may assist with definition-building, measurement and amelioration of isolation experiences. The circumstances and experiences shared by urban and farm women should be compared to look at isolation in a new way, as a phenomenon not solely determined by geographical location or by occupational choice.

The role of support and community services including marriage counselling and enrichment programs and availability of off-farm employment should be included in future studies of farm women and isolation. There is no way at present to determine if these opportunities were more readily available and used more extensively whether reports of isolation would decrease, increase or remain constant. Use of these services may play a role in relieving feelings of isolation for farm women.

2. New Hypotheses

Several new hypotheses are suggested by the results of this research.

One strong trend in this data is the relationship between satisfaction with work roles and feelings of isolation. There is a tendency for women who enjoy farm work to be more satisfied with farming as a lifestyle. And those who rate farming as a way of life quite highly report satisfaction with friendships in two dimensions: overall

satisfaction, and satisfaction with friends' help to cope with tensions. Both personal satisfaction with farm work and the importance of farm work to the respondent appear to influence reports of satisfaction with amount of contact with friends. The question remains whether involvement in farm work per se and the satisfaction this involvement brings alters a farm woman's perceptions of her isolation or feelings of loneliness.

The relationship between off-farm employment and feelings of social isolation also requires further investigation. Participation in the outside labour force by itself may not be the factor affecting feelings of isolation. One author suggests that it may in fact increase feelings of dissatisfaction with the social aspects of farm life (Scholl, 1982). The satisfaction a woman feels about her work role is again the variable that requires further research to determine its impact on feelings of isolation. This also holds true for volunteer work and household work. Most farm women perform both household and community volunteer work, but it is not the amount of work but the experiences of satisfaction with that work that appear to influence feelings of isolation. Future research should focus on both the salience of work roles and the satisfactions they bring in relation to feelings of social isolation.

A second major trend in this research is the association between the quality of the marital relationship

and feelings of isolation. This phenomenon suggests a new direction for isolation research: to determine if personal abilities in relationship-building, or the skills and attitudes one has to create satisfying social and intimate relationships is the factor that differentiates women who feel isolated from those who do not feel isolated, regardless of other lifestyle circumstances. Research that addresses this issue would help to clarify the perception prevalent in the literature that farm women as a group experience isolation.

Women's lives are greatly affected by changes in family composition. The changing demands of child-rearing over the years means great variations in amount of free time available for work roles and personal needs. Farm women's lives are characterized by a second fluctuation in demands on their time due to the seasonal changes in work on the farm enterprise and subsequently in all their work roles. The examination of isolation as changing phenomenon, both seasonally, and in response to stages of child-rearing suggest new directions for research more sensitive to the circumstances of women living on farms.

The area of personality characteristics relating to feelings of isolation has been suggested in terms of one's ability to build satisfying relationships. Mastery and stress scales were included in this research to determine associations between these feelings and feelings of isolation for farm women. Although very weak correlations

resulted, further research may reveal stronger associations between both the sources and experiences of feelings of mastery and stress in women's lives and feelings of isolation. The relationship between work role satisfaction, satisfaction with marital relationship, and feelings of mastery and stress should be explored as part of the analysis.

Suggestions for Practice

Practitioners who provide assistance to farm families must reassess their assumptions about social isolation experiences and the solutions proposed to cope with them. Social isolation should not be viewed as a natural consequence of living and working on a farm several miles from the closest neighbour. Feelings of social isolation are often experienced as a result of difficulties or dissatisfaction in the marital relationship. It appears then that one on one counselling or treatments directed at only the farm woman expressing feelings of isolation or their symptomology are inappropriate. The farm couple and even their children if feasible should be involved together in making changes that address a farm woman's feelings of isolation.

Formal networking or involvement in organizations is often proposed as a solution for feelings of social isolation. This appears to be a very limited remedy, based on the findings of this study. Historically this solution may have been effective, but in modern farm life these

formal contacts are meaningful only if they spawn informal more personal friendships that are supportive, spontaneous and help family members to cope with family tensions.

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APPENDIX A Questionnaire

The owner of the farm should answer this section.

A STUDY OF ALBERTA FARMERS

We would like to know some general information about your farm. Please answer the following questions.

1. How many acres are there in your farm? Please fill out the chart below.

Acres	Acres Hay and Pasture	Acres Cropped	Acres Summerfallow	Acres Other	Total Acres
Owned					
Rented by you					
Rented out to other(s)					

2. Which of the following best describes your farm? Please check (✓) only one.

_____ 1 one grain or oilseed crop
_____ 2 more than one grain or oilseed crop
_____ 3 one grain or oilseed and livestock
_____ 4 more than one grain or oilseed and livestock
_____ 5 other (Please specify) _____

3. How would you describe the legal ownership arrangement of your farm? Please check (✓) the most accurate one.

____ 1 individual ownership (male)
____ 2 individual ownership (female)
____ 3 joint ownership by husband and wife
____ 4 individual and joint ownership
____ 5 partnership with written agreement
____ 6 partnership with unwritten agreement
____ 7 family corporation
____ 8 other corporation

4. Do you live on your farm?
   ____ 1 yes ____ 2 no

5. What was your total gross value of agriculture products sold from January 1 to December 31, 1983?

   $_____

6. What was your net farm income from January 1 to December 31, 1983?

   $_____

7. What was your total farm debt on December 31, 1983?

   $_____

8. How stressed do you feel by your farm debt? Please circle your response.

No Stress				A Great Deal of Stress	No Farm Debt
1	2	3	4	5	0

9. If you could not obtain operating financing to cope with your debt, which of the following would you do? Please circle your response for each item.

	Yes	No	Not Applicable
Consolidate loans	1	2	0
Remortgage	1	2	0
Sell livestock	1	2	0
Sell machinery	1	2	0
Sell land	1	2	0
Lease or rent your land	1	2	0
Take an off-farm job (you or spouse)	1	2	0
Other (please specify) _____	1	2	0

10. We would like to know who works on your farm and in your household.

I. A. Start with yourself.
B. Circle the appropriate sex.
C. Give your age in years.
D. Of all the work done on your farm, write the percentage that you do.
E. Circle whether you are paid.
F. Of all the work done in the household, write the percentage that you do.
G. Circle whether you are paid.

II. List the members of your family who work on your farm or in your household in column A, give their relationship to you and fill in columns B through G for each person.

III. List all other people who work on your farm or in your household in column A and fill in columns B through G for each person.

A. Relationship to Yourself	B. Sex Male-Female	C. Age	D. % of Total FARM Work Done	E. Wages Paid for FARM Work Yes - No	F. % of Total HOUSEHOLD Work Done	G. Wages Paid for HOUSEHOLD Work Yes - No
SELF	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
_____	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
_____	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
_____	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
_____	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
_____	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
_____	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
_____	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
_____	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
_____	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
_____	M - F	___ yrs	_____%	Y - N	_____%	Y - N
(use reverse if necessary)			Total 100 %		Total 100 %	

The female (wife) of the farm operation should answer this section.

A STUDY OF ALBERTA FARMERS

1. Please estimate the total number of hours per month you spent on the following farm and household activities in 1983.

FARM WORK	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
a) Field Work (including driving field machinery, driving truck, bringing meals to field)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs
b) Secretarial/Bookkeeper (including correspondence, keeping records and filing, bookkeeping, preparing income tax, banking)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs
c) Management (including supervising farm help, discussing and making decisions, purchasing items, marketing products)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs
d) Building and Property Maintenance (including building maintenance, fencing, related work, weed spraying)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs
e) Equipment Maintenance (including repairing, cleaning, fueling)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
FARM WORK												
f) Chores (including feeding and watering livestock, performing milking chores, cleaning barns, helping with farm animals)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs
g) Other Farm Related Work (including running errands, travelling time)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs
HOUSEHOLD WORK												
a) Taking Care of People (including caring for children, transporting children, caring for other family member(s)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs
b) Management (including supervising hired help, purchasing items, discussing and making decisions, entertaining visitors)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs
c) Home Maintenance (including repairing, cleaning, doing laundry, cooking)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs
d) Production (including gardening, preserving food, doing home sewing)	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs

2.

2. Do any of the following prevent you from doing farm work?

	Yes	No
Lack of physical strength	1	2
Poor health	1	2
Lack of confidence	1	2
Lack of skill or knowledge	1	2
Lack of interest	1	2
Lack of time	1	2
Off-farm paid work	1	2
Off-farm unpaid work	1	2
Other (please specify) _____	1	2

3. Do any of the following prevent you from doing household work?

	Yes	No
Lack of physical strength	1	2
Poor health	1	2
Lack of confidence	1	2
Lack of skill or knowledge	1	2
Lack of interest	1	2
Lack of time	1	2
Off-farm paid work	1	2
Off-farm unpaid work	1	2
Other (please specify) _____	1	2

We would like to know your opinions about your farm work. For each question please circle the number that best describes how you feel. (If you are NOT involved in farm work, please go to question 7).

4. How important to you is your farm work?

1	2	3	4	5
Unimportant				Extremely Important

5. How much personal satisfaction do you receive from your farm work?

1	2	3	4	5
Very Little Satisfaction				A Great Deal of Satisfaction

6. If there were no economic necessity, would you still want to do farm work?

1	2
Yes	No

We would also like to know your opinions about your household work. For each question please circle the number that best describes how you feel. (If you are NOT involved in household work, please go to question 10).

7. How important to you is your household work?

1	2	3	4	5
Unimportant				Extremely Important

8. How much personal satisfaction do you receive from your household work?

1	2	3	4	5
Very Little Satisfaction				A Great Deal of Satisfaction

9. If there were no economic necessity, would you still want to do household work?

1	2
Yes	No

We would like to know about your paid off-farm work.

10. In 1983 did you do any paid off-farm work? (If you had NO paid off-farm work in 1983, please go to question 21).

1	2
Yes	No

11. For each month in 1983 give the number of hours in which you did paid off-farm work.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs

12. What were your jobs? Please list the job title, eg., bus driver, carpenter.

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

13. What was your total gross income from off-farm work in 1983?

$ _____

14. Please estimate the percentage of your off-farm income that went toward the following in 1983.

farm operation _____%
household operation _____%
other _____%

15. For how many years have you had off-farm work? _____ years

Now we would like to know your opinions about your off-farm work. Please circle the number that best describes how you feel.

16. How important to you was your off farm paid work? 99

1	2	3	4	5
Unimportant				Extremely Important

17. How much personal satisfaction did you receive from your off-farm paid work?

1	2	3	4	5
Very Little Satisfaction				A Great Deal of Satisfaction

18. If there were no economic necessity, would you still want to be involved in your off-farm work?

1	2
Yes	No

19. How important do you think your contribution of off-farm income was to the farm operation?

1	2	3	4	5
Unimportant				Extremely Important

20. How important do you think your contribution of off-farm income was to the operation of the household?

1	2	3	4	5
Unimportant				Extremely Important

The following questions are about the unpaid work you do off the farm.

21. In 1983 did you do any unpaid work such as volunteer activities in community, church, political, or farm-related organizations. (If you had NO volunteer activities in 1983, please go to question 24).

1	2
Yes	No

22. For each month in 1983, give the number of hours in which you did unpaid/volunteer work.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
____ hrs	____ hrs	____ hrs	____ hrs	____ hrs	____ hrs	____ hrs	____ hrs	____ hrs	____ hrs	____ hrs	____ hrs

23. Please list the organizations and the work that you did in each.

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

24. In 1983 did you do any <u>other unpaid work for other people</u>? Examples would be helping a neighbour with farm work or child care. (If NO, please go to question 27). 100

1 Yes 2 No

25. For each month in 1983, give the number of hours for which you did unpaid work for others.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs	___ hrs

26. Please list what you did.

_____ _____

_____ _____

Now we would like to know your opinions about your <u>unpaid off-farm work</u>. Please circle the number that best describes how you feel.

27. How important to you is your volunteer work?

1 Unimportant 2 3 4 5 Extremely Important

28. How much personal satisfaction do you receive from your volunteer work?

1 Very Little Satisfaction 2 3 4 5 A Great Deal of Satisfaction

The following questions ask how you feel about your various activities.

29. How often are you troubled about the following?

	Always Troubled				Never Troubled	Not Applicable
	1	2	3	4	5	0
Neglecting:						
farm duties	1	2	3	4	5	0
household duties	1	2	3	4	5	0
off-farm paid work	1	2	3	4	5	0
volunteer work	1	2	3	4	5	0
Wanting to give more time to:						
farm	1	2	3	4	5	0
home	1	2	3	4	5	0
off-farm paid work	1	2	3	4	5	0
volunteer work	1	2	3	4	5	0
Not fulfilling expectations:						
of yourself	1	2	3	4	5	0
of others	1	2	3	4	5	0

The questions that follow are about your health. Please circle the number that best describes how often you have had each of the following experiences during the past year.

	Very Often		Sometimes		Never
	1	2	3	4	5
30. Have you been taking prescription or nonprescription medication?	1	2	3	4	5
31. Have illness or accidents kept you from doing things you need or want to do?	1	2	3	4	5
32. How frequently have you visited the doctor?	1	2	3	4	5
33. Have you any trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep?	1	2	3	4	5
34. Have you been bothered by shortness of breath when you were not exercising or working hard?	1	2	3	4	5
35. Have you had fainting spells?	1	2	3	4	5
36. Have you been bothered by nervousness (irritable, fidgety, tense)?	1	2	3	4	5
37. Have you been so restless that you cannot sit still for long?	1	2	3	4	5
38. Have you sometimes felt that people are against you for no good reason?	1	2	3	4	5
39. Have you had worries that get you down physically?	1	2	3	4	5
40. Have you been worried by loneliness?	1	2	3	4	5

For each of the following questions please circle the answer that best describes your feelings.

	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
41. I have little control over the things that happen to me.	1	2	3	4	5
42. There is really no way I can solve some of the problems I have.	1	2	3	4	5
43. There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
44. I often feel helpless in dealing with problems of life.	1	2	3	4	5
45. Sometimes I feel that I'm being pushed around in life.	1	2	3	4	5
46. What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me.	1	2	3	4	5
47. I can do just about anything I set my mind to.	1	2	3	4	5

In this section are questions about your marriage. (If you are NOT married, please go to question 53.)

	Very Unsatisfied 1	2	3	4	Very Satisfied 5	Not Applicable 0
48. How satisfied are you with the amount of support or understanding your spouse gives you in regard to your						
farm work	1	2	3	4	5	0
household work	1	2	3	4	5	0
off-farm paid work	1	2	3	4	5	0
volunteer work	1	2	3	4	5	0

	Yes	No	Not Applicable
49. If your spouse objected strongly, would you still want to be involved in your			
farm work	1	2	0
household work	1	2	0
off-farm paid work	1	2	0
volunteer work	1	2	0

	Very Unsatisfied				Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
	1	2	3	4	5	0
50. Overall, how satisfied are you with the amount of work your spouse contributes to						
the farm	1	2	3	4	5	0
the household	1	2	3	4	5	0

51. Overall, how satisfied are you with the way your spouse helps you cope with your tensions?

Very Unsatisfied				Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
1	2	3	4	5	0

52. Overall how satisfied are you with your marriage?

Very Unsatisfied				Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
1	2	3	4	5	0

And these questions ask about your friends.

53. Do you see your friends as often as you would like?

1	2
Yes	No

54. Overall, how satisfied are you with your friendships?

Very Unsatisfied				Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
1	2	3	4	5	0

55. Overall how satisfied are you with the way your friends help you cope with your tensions?

Very Unsatisfied				Very Satisfied	Not Applicable
1	2	3	4	5	0

The following questions are about farming in general.

56. Did you grow up on a farm?

_____ Yes
_____ No

If no, at what age did you begin farming? _____ years of age.

57. How satisfied are you with farming as a way of life?

Very Unsatisfied				Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5

58. How satisfied are you with farming as a way to make a living?

Very Unsatisfied				Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5

Finally, we would like some information about you.

59. How old are you? _____ years

60. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

_____ elementary
_____ junior high
_____ senior high
_____ technical/vocational training
_____ university degree (undergraduate)
_____ university degree (graduate)

61. What is your current marital status?

_____ married
_____ never married
_____ common law
_____ widowed
_____ separated
_____ divorced

62. How may children do you have? Please include children from second and subsequent marriages if applicable.

_____ children

63. Please complete the following information about your children.

Child	Sex Male-Female M F	Age	Living at Home Yes - No Y N
1	M F	_____	Y N
2	M F	_____	Y N
3	M F	_____	Y N
4	M F	_____	Y N
5	M F	_____	Y N
6	M F	_____	Y N
7	M F	_____	Y N
8	M F	_____	Y N
9	M F	_____	Y N
10	M F	_____	Y N

64. Including yourself, how many people are living in your home? _____ people

65. Aside from your spouse and children, does anyone else live in your home?

_____ Yes _____ No

66. If yes, please list the people and their relationship to you (eg. mother-in-law, brother, hired helper).

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION!

(Please use this space for additional comments).

APPENDIX B

Table VIII

Pearson Product Correlations

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Cases
1. Do you see your friends as often as you would like.	Mastery scale	.1576	283
	Satisfaction with off-farm employment	.1984	101
	Age of children	.1980	177
	Age of respondent	.1351	285
	Importance of farm work to respondent	.1747	236
	Personal satisfaction with farm work	.1302	236
2. Overall how satisfied are you with your friendships?	Satisfaction with marital relationship	.4076	276
	Satisfaction with farming as a way of life	.3258	284
	Satisfaction with support from husband for farm work	.1607	237
	Importance of volunteer work to individual	.1327	211
3. Overall how satisfied are you with the way your friends help you cope with your tensions?	Satisfaction with farming as a way of life	.1482	281

The correlation coefficient (r) is a measure of the extent to which the dependent variable and independent variable covary.

Figure 2

Reciprocal Causation: a separate analysis

In order to test the hypothesis that a reciprocal effect may be occuring between dependent variables and independent variables measuring satisfaction, a second multiple regression analysis was devised. The analysis and results are presented here.

satisfaction variables	1 marital satisfaction 2 satisfaction with off farm employment 3 importance of farm work 4 satisfaction with farm work 5 satisfaction with households work 6 satisfaction with volunteer work 7 satisfaction with support from husband for farm work 8 importance of volunteer work	satisfaction with farming as a way of life

Figure 3

Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis:
satisfaction with farming as a way of life

personal satisfaction with farm work
.625
satisfaction with husband's support for off-farm paid work
.363
Satisfaction with farming as a way of life
R^2 = .538

These results use the beta weights (normalized regression coefficients) from multiple regression equations in which satisfaction with farming as a way of life is the dependent variable and all other satisfaction measures are independent variables.

The values of the beta weights represent the fraction of the change in standard deviations of the dependent variables listed when all other independent variables are held constant.

R2 is the estimate of amount of variance shared by the variables.

Table IX

Mastery Scale

Have you been taking prescription or nonprescription medication?
Have illness or accidents kept you from doing things you need or want to do?
How frequently have you visited the doctor?
Have you any trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep?
Have you been bothered by shortness of breath when you were not exercising or working hard?
Have you had fainting spells?
Have you been bothered by nervousness (irritable, fidgety, tense)?
Have you sometimes felt that people are against you for no good reason?
Have you had worries that get you down physically?
Have you been worried by loneliness?

Table X

Stress Scale

I have little control over the things that happen to me.
There is really no way I can solve some of the problems I have.
There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.
I often feel helpless in dealing with problems of life.
Sometimes I feel that I'm being pushed around in life.
What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me.
I can do just about anything I set my mind to.

APPENDIX C

Five Farm Women Speak

On August 19 and 20, 1985, I spent two days visiting five farms near Red Deer and Drumheller, Alberta. My purpose was to share the social isolation survey results with women who lived on these farms and solicit their comments based on their life experiences. This summary of the five interviews begins with a brief description of each of the five farm women I visited. A discussion of the main points raised by the women in our conversations will complete the summary.

Five Farm Women

The first woman I met with was under thirty-five with two school age children. She moved to the farm several years after she married, having lived in cities all her life until she and her husband decided to live and work beside his parents on the family farm. She has a university degree and was employed full-time until the move to the farm. Her current lifestyle shows a high degree of involvement in organized community activities and a significant amount of time devoted to home production activities: gardening, canning, freezing, as well as farm work and household maintenance.

* my thanks to Jim Lougheed, of the Farm Laboratory in the Department of Rural Economy, University of Alberta, who encouraged me and assisted me to do these interviews

The second woman I visited was over fifty, and a grandmother with two children living in the city. She was born and raised on the farm on which she lives, although for a short period of time she and her husband lived in Calgary. She is very involved in community social life. Household work, yard work, gardening and household production activities take up most of her time at home.

The third interview was conducted with a woman who is between thirty five and forty, with a school age daughter. She was raised on an Alberta farm, although she and her husband have been farming for just the last twelve years. She worked in Calgary for a few years prior to and for several years after her marriage before moving overseas to live for a period of time. She is involved in some community activity, and some household production work in addition to home maintenance.

The fourth woman I saw is between forty and fifty and the mother of two teenagers. She was a teacher and a city dweller until marriage, which was when her new husband decided to take over the family farm. She is active in community activities, and does home production and household work.

The fifth farm woman I interviewed is under thirty-five and mother of a school age son. She was raised on a farm and married quite young to a farmer in the same area. She is very active in community activities, does home

production and household work and is very involved in the work of the farm. She has a grade twelve education.

Characteristics to Note About the Five Women:

- none of the five women is employed off the farm: three of the five women were employed full-time until moving to the farm
- two of the women are very involved in the work of the farm enterprise; one helps occasionally; two never do farm work
- the two women who are involved in farm work are the youngest (under 35) in the group of five
- all five women are well educated: the minimum education level is grade twelve and two of the five women have university degrees
- all five women live on farms that were passed down by the previous generation, usually the husband's parents except in one case it was the wife's parents. Also, two of the women live right beside their in-laws on the same farm.
- all five women have small families, with one or two children. Only in one case was an extended family member, the woman's brother, also a member of the household.

Main Points Raised By Five Farm Women

Those women without a farming background felt it might have made a difference in their initial adjustment to farm life as an adult. A farm background in childhood, several

women felt, would have prepared them for the loneliness and isolation they experienced in their first few years on the farm.

All five women expressed the belief that geographical distance now has little influence on farm families' activities. People do not feel restricted by the time or driving distance required to see friends or use services in towns or larger urban centres.

Most farm people are involved in organized community activities, both as individuals and in family groups. Sports, clubs, courses and lessons were the most commonly named. Those activities show a seasonal pattern compatible with farming: busy activity season is winter, spring and fall are moderate and summer activity is very child-oriented. Volunteer work is intertwined with participation in these activities in some communities simply because if the farm people don't run them, they don't happen at all. Special event social activity, such as showers, weddings, funerals and fundraisers are not viewed as optional by most farm people. It is expected that one takes part in these whole heartedly as they are considered a responsibility of every member of the community, not just the family immediately involved.

This social responsibility theme is reflected in numerous ways by farm women. Several suggested that farm people enjoy a closeness that sharing a similar occupation and helping each other out creates, that in fact farm folk

work harder at keeping their neighbours friends. The continuity that this underlying feeling of social responsibility brings is a special feature of farm social life and is a mixed blessing. A farm woman can pick her close friends, but not all her friends. She still has to see regularly and help out people of whom she may not be very fond. Selection of a trustworthy confidante is important, for the continuity of social exchanges means you have to be careful whom you talk to about personal matters. The continuity of social life, underlined by this feeling of responsibility for one's neighbours, provides an important sense of security and belonging. Farm people feel cared about by other members of their community, and they always have help when it is needed.

All five women agreed that the age of their children dictated to some degree the type of social and community activities and the type of people with which they became involved. Preschool age children usually meant more home-centred visiting, while school age children introduced more organized community activity and a wider circle of aquaintances into the family social pattern. Some women also feel that because the investment in one's lifestyle is so heavy, family members have a special bonding-together feeling.

The social expectations and patterns of a farming community are quite clearly defined. These are two key factors that appear to ameliorate any individual feelings

of alienation or isolation for women trying to live within the expectations and patterns. They are the expression of independence and freedom, and satisfaction with and feelings of competence about work roles. The freedom to choose what to do and when to do it is an enviable feature of a woman working for her own business. The availability of a second vehicle is essential to make this possible. The other important part of freedom of choice is the independence she asserts for herself and the independence her husband encourages her to enjoy. Several women felt the dependence of farm men on farm women is a real curb to women's independence. A few also expressed the view that some farm women are deliberately curtailed by their husbands in any independent interests or activities they attempt to pursue. Most women felt that farm life offers greater opportunities for contact with others because of the control one has over work and social time patterns, and the overlap of work with social interaction in conducting the business of farming.

Out of the social expectations and patterns theme came also the issue of competence and of satisfaction with the role of farm wife. Both feeling competent and being seen as competent are very important to all the women I interviewed. The definition of a "good farm wife" seems to be formed by both the husband and by the community of peers. How a woman judges herself against this standard appears to have a tremendous impact on her social identity

and the quality of social interactions she enjoys within the social environment in which she lives.

While a woman may develop competence in a particular role, that of cook for example, she may achieve little satisfaction from it. Repeatedly, the importance of involvement in satisfying work appeared to influence a woman's feelings of alienation and isolation. Several who enjoyed their parenting role with preschoolers never missed their outside contacts. And those who were restricted to roles which provided little meaning or satisfaction expressed a real sense of loneliness living on the farm. Those with many roles, some of which brought satisfaction while other did not, seemed to find farming a rewarding lifestyle and their social lives complete. In particular, those who added the farmer role to those of mother, housekeeper, cook, bookkeeper, etc. expressed great satisfaction and enthusiasm for the type of lives they had built for themselves and their families.